

SOLIDARITY AND FISSION

182 women are no longer as desirable as in the good old days,
796 nor are men as brave and strong. Correspondingly, the
[756] shamans are thought to have lost much of their power and
knowledge. Besides, there are significant social and economic reasons for the lapse of the ceremonies. The larger ceremony fell into abeyance after the migration to the Cururú River had gained full force, and the shorter form was terminated after the exodus had reduced the savannah population to its present 360. Significantly, the Dajearuparip ended in 1945, at the conclusion of the period of rising rubber prices in World War II and the concomitant growing preoccupation of the Mundurucú Indians with extraction of latex. Thus, there is not only an insufficient number of shamans at present, but there are not enough people left in the savannahs to stage a large-scale reunion.

[224] Furthermore, only the campineiros, a bare one-quarter of the total Mundurucú population, still depend on game as the principal source of protein; the others rely primarily

[226] on fishing, and the ceremonies have correspondingly less economic significance to them. Finally, to the degree that the old social system has weakened, so also has this positive, affirmative aspect of the religion. The rites were vital to tribal unity and male activity and were a function of them. The decay of intervillage coöperation in other spheres and the inevitability of eventual abandonment of residence on the savannahs make the Mundurucú apathetic to the continuity of the group-based and group-affirmative rituals—actually, those aspects of relations with the supernatural that Emile Durkheim defined as “religion.”* The people still believe in the game-animal spirits and still give credence to the efficacy of the ceremonial means of propitiating them. But the failure to translate the

● [269] beliefs into the realm of action has robbed them of im-

* Durkheim, 1947.

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mediate reality and caused their transmission to the young to become attenuated. ¹⁸² ⁷⁹⁶ ⁸⁶⁴ ●

Shamanism and the corollary belief in sorcery have had, however, remarkable persistence among the Mundurucu. This continuity is not, perhaps, so unusual when one considers that similar practices may be found among the rural Amazonian population and even among the lower classes in north Brazilian cities. The Mundurucu shaman is believed to be endowed at birth with special supernatural powers inherited from his father. He usually receives tutelage in the art from his elders, but even if he is uninstructed and never engages in actual practice, he is still considered a shaman and capable of special relations with the supernatural. ⁷⁵⁶ [754] [428]

The shaman's major task is the cure of disease and injury. Formerly he also had ceremonial roles, but these are largely defunct today. Disease is thought to be caused by intrusive objects made and spread by sorcerers, and the shaman extracts them by the technique, widespread in South America, of blowing tobacco smoke on the patient and removing the malignant object by suction or rubbing. There are generally one or two shamans, but seldom more, in savannah villages. ⁷⁵

The skills of the shamans are in constant demand, and great dependence is placed on them. But despite the high prestige that they are accorded, their position is ambivalent. Although only shamans can cure disease, only they also have the supernatural power of disease-causing witchcraft, and a sorcerer is believed to be a shaman "gone bad." Shamans are generally not thought to practice sorcery with limited ends and against particular persons. Their magic can be used to inflict harm on individuals, but they are more commonly believed to spread malignant objects that attack and sicken people indiscriminately. The ⁷⁵⁴